

Benefits of Military Deployments for Children

There's no doubt about it, deployments are tough for children, but did you know there are some *benefits* to military deployment for children? They include:

- Increased independence and self-confidence.
- Strengthened relationship with parent at home.
- Families learn to establish goals and plan together.
- Re-evaluation of rules.
- Child and deployed parent may become closer through letters, emails, cards and packages.
- Children learn about the world and world affairs.

Ten Deployment Tips for Families

Strong families are more likely to succeed during deployments. Tips for military families include:

1. Be a good role model by demonstrating good coping techniques.
2. Allow and encourage children to express their feelings and try to accept them.
3. Establish rules and limits, as a family, BEFORE deployment around the issues of:
 - Consequences for disobeying family rules.
 - Money and allowances.
 - Chores and responsibilities.
 - Avoid saying, "Wait until your father/mother gets home!"
 - Be flexible enough to adjust the rules and limits as necessary
4. Spend time together as a family, with each child and as a couple.
5. Communicate via:
 - Video and audio tapes.
 - Schoolwork and progress reports.
 - Letters, email, and postcards to EACH child.
 - Journals.
 - Pictures.
 - Telephone.
6. Emphasize the importance of school:
 - Visit school before deployment and talk to teacher.
 - Leave stamped envelopes for teacher to mail progress reports, schoolwork, etc.
 - Tell your child that school is important.

- Send cards, letters, pictures, foreign money, restaurant menus, etc to class.
 - Volunteer to be "show and tell" upon return.
7. Allow children to help with preparation:
 - Help pack.
 - Discuss ways child can assist at home.
 - Make family plans before the deployment.
 8. If possible, visit the ship or command:
 - Show child your rack, the mess deck, and work center.
 - Explain your job and the Navy mission.
 - Go on the Internet or to the library to get information about the geography, culture and people of the area of the deployment.
 - Discuss the importance of training and safety.
 9. Be patriotic:
 - Tell your children about your job.
 - Hang flags and banners.
 - Provide ball caps and other command insignia to your children.
 - Attend command sponsored events such as picnics and holiday parties.
 - Introduce your children to your shipmates.
 10. Get help if needed. Contact:
 - The Fleet and Family Support Center.
 - Military One Source.
 - A Chaplain.
 - TRICARE Mental Health Services.

Deployment Readiness Checklist for Expectant Parents

Not being together as a couple for the pregnancy and birth of a child is a challenge, but there are some things couples can do as soon to be parents while separated.

- ☐ Have you discussed your feelings about being separated during pregnancy and the birth of your child?
- ☐ Will the pregnant spouse send pictures of self throughout the pregnancy?
- ☐ Will she write or keep journals about doctor visits, the baby kicking, sonograms, etc.?
- ☐ Can you share books, articles, websites about pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting?

- ☐ Do you communicate openly about hopes, dreams, fears, and expectations each of you have for your child?
- ☐ Do you each have a support system – someone you can talk to about your concerns and feelings?
- ☐ Have you talked about using the American Red Cross for notification of the baby's birth?
- ☐ Is there a plan in place for when the baby is born? Is a family member coming? Lamaze coach? Who will be caring for other children?
- ☐ Do you talk about how life will be different after the baby arrives and the deployment is over?

Deployment Readiness Checklist for Parent of Infants and Toddlers (Birth to about 3 years)

Infants and toddlers live in the here and now. They reflect the behaviors and emotions of their primary caretaker. The most effective way to assist an infant or toddler through a deployment is for their primary caretaker to practice good self care.

- ☐ Are you aware of the developmental milestones your infant or toddler is achieving? They may be:
 - Mastering motor skills such as crawling, walking and running.
 - Learning to control bodily functions such as potty training.
 - Learning to talk and increasing their vocabulary.
 - Becoming independent.
- ☐ Are you aware of your infant or toddlers preferences? They tend to prefer familiar people and things. Routine is important.
- ☐ How does your infant or toddler react to stress? They typically have physical and emotional reactions such as:
 - Being fussy, clingy, or even aggressive.
 - Regressing in potty training, walking, or thumb sucking.
 - Unexplained crying.
- ☐ What are the rules and routines in your family? Can you maintain them as much as possible during the deployment?
- ☐ Can you ignore attention-getting behaviors such as whining and temper tantrums and be sure to give plenty of attention as soon as the attention-getting behavior stops?
- ☐ Does the parent who is staying at home have a plan for “me” time? It’s important to recharge your batteries in order to be more fully available to your infant or toddler.
- ☐ Do you have a good child care provider?
- ☐ What are your plans for keeping the deploying parent connected – pictures, video/audio tapes, journals, etc.?
- ☐ Has the deploying parent read and **recorded** your child’s favorite books or songs on audio or video tape?
- ☐ Laminate or put in a zip lock baggie, a picture of the deploying parent and child doing something fun together for the child to have.
- ☐ Can you schedule more time for hugs and cuddles with your little one?

Deployment Readiness Checklist for Parents of Preschoolers (3 – 5 years)

Deployments can be challenging with preschoolers as they miss their deployed parent and have no concept of time for their return. Lots of love and activity can make the deployment go more smoothly.

- ☐ Are you aware of the developmental milestones your preschooler may be achieving? They:
 - Are expanding their verbal skills.
 - May be very active. Play time is very important for muscle development.
 - May believe their behavior caused mom/dad to leave.
 - Imitate your behaviors.
 - Do not have a clear understanding of the concept of time.
- ☐ How does your preschooler react to stress? They may:
 - Regress to infantile behaviors.
 - Cling to people or a favorite toy/blanket.
 - Change eating or sleeping patterns.
 - Fear new people or situations.
 - Display aggressive behavior.
- ☐ Have you told your preschooler that mommy/daddy has to go away for their job?
- ☐ Can you ignore attention-getting behaviors (unless they are destructive) and give attention when your child is doing what you want?
- ☐ Can you allow additional one-on-one time with your preschooler?
- ☐ Can you accept a wide range of strong emotion? Preschoolers are learning about emotions. The intensity of their emotions may be frightening to both them and you! Remember that feelings are neither right nor wrong. Allow your little one to feel angry, sad, or scared.
- ☐ Have you talked with your child's school or day care teacher, told them of your deployment and ask them to send copies of school work? Be sure to include self-addressed, stamped envelopes.
- ☐ Can you arrange for your preschooler to spend time with grandparents or other caring adults?

- ☐ Has the deploying parent read and recorded your child's favorite books or songs on audio or video tape?
- ☐ Have you created a photo album of pictures of the deploying parent child doing things together?
- ☐ Will your child be able to see the ship or plane leave for deployment?

Deployment Readiness Checklist for Parents of School Age Children (ages 6 – 12)

School age children may feel a great loss when a parent is deployed. They may not be willing to "burden" the parent who remains at home so it is important to find other safe adults for your child to communicate their sadness and concerns.

- ☐ Are you aware of the developmental milestones your school age child may be achieving? They:
 - Think in terms of "black or white," "good or bad," "right or wrong".
 - Rebel verbally rather than with temper tantrums.
 - Are learning social rules. School and peers are very important.
 - Rules and fairness are very important.
- ☐ How does your school age child react to stress?
 - School performance may decline.
 - Complaints of illnesses such as, headaches, stomachaches.
 - Emotional reactions include increased irritability, anger, or guilt.
 - Fascination with the military and news seen or read.
 - Taking on the absent adult's responsibilities may occur.
- ☐ Have you had a family meeting to discuss the deployment?
- ☐ Have you told your child where you are going, why you are going and approximately when you will return, if known?
- ☐ Have you addressed any concerns your child may have about safety?
- ☐ Have you made a communication plan with your child and provided them with the tools they need to stay in touch with you such as stationary, pens, markers, stamped, self-addressed envelopes, etc?
- ☐ Did you include money in your budget for phone calls, gifts/souvenirs for your children?

- ☐ Do you and your child have a support system – people you can reach in person, by phone or email - you can turn to for assistance during the deployment?
- ☐ Will your child be able to see you off when you leave for deployment?
- ☐ Have you avoided putting added responsibilities on your child by not making comments such as “You’re the man in the family” or “Take care of your little brother?”
- ☐ Do you have plans to keep your children busy during deployment with fun activities including sports, scouts, music, church, etc.?
- ☐ Have you considered requesting a mentor for your child through the national Big Brothers/Big Sisters program, church, or a family member?
- ☐ Have you talked with your child’s school teacher, told them of your deployment and ask them to send copies of school work and report cards? Be sure to include self- addressed, stamped envelopes.
- ☐ Have you asked if your child’s school sponsors a discussion group or other program for children of deployed military parents?
- ☐ Have you informed the school counselor of your upcoming deployment?
- ☐ Have you discussed what role, if any, your child’s other parent will have during your deployment?
- ☐ Have you informed extended family members about your upcoming deployment and asked them to keep in contact with your child?
- ☐ Have you created a photo album for you and each of your children doing things together?
- ☐ Did you leave a personal item of yours for each of your children to keep until your return?
- ☐ Have you told your children that you love them?

Deployment Readiness Checklist for Parents of Teenagers

Sometimes teens seem so grown up that we forget they are still children who need love and guidance. Teens need much of the same support and encouragement that younger children require.

- ☐ Are you aware of the developmental milestones your teenager may be achieving?
They are:
 - Gaining independence and becoming more responsible.
 - Trying new behaviors.
 - Unpredictable - new friends, hairstyles, piercing, clothes, music, etc.
 - Questioning the “status quo.”
 - Are aware of world issues.
- ☐ How does your teen typically react to stress? They may:
 - Have personality changes such being moody, loud, or quiet.
 - Challenge parent's ideas and way of life.
 - Be very sensitive and feel misunderstood.
 - Experience a drop in school performance.
 - Experiment with alcohol or drugs.
- ☐ Have you had a family meeting to discuss the deployment?
- ☐ Have you told your teenager where you are going, why you are going and approximately when you will return, if known?
- ☐ Have you addressed any concerns your teen may have about safety?
- ☐ Have you made **a communication plan with your teenager**, provided them with your email and regular mail address, and asked them to keep in touch?
- ☐ Have you reminded your teen that school work is important and that you’d like to receive progress reports from them?
- ☐ Did you include money in your budget for phone calls, gifts/souvenirs for your teenager?
- ☐ Do you and your teen have a support system – people you can reach in person, by phone or email - you can turn to for assistance during the deployment?
- ☐ Have you avoided putting added responsibilities on your teen by not making comments such as “You’re the man in the family” or “Take care of your little brother”?
- ☐ Have you asked if your teen’s school sponsors a discussion group or other program for teens of deployed military parents?
- ☐ Have you remembered that although your teen may look and often act like an adult, that they still need your love and guidance?